

The Spiritual Instructions
of our Venerated Founder
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Canon of St. Bavon

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The "Spiritual Instructions" were translated from French to English over fifty years ago. The English in use at that time has, for the most part, been retained.

Some Thoughts on Advent

Recall to your mind with what longing the Patriarchs, Prophets and all the saints of the Old Testament wished for the Messiah. "Oh! If you would open heaven and come down to us," cried some; others exclaimed, "Heavens send forth your dew, and let the clouds descend upon the just as a gentle rain." "Let the earth open and bring forth the Savior,"

As for us, my children in Jesus Christ, let us thank God for having given us him who was the Desire of nations, and let us try to understand the greatness of the favor. Let us excite within ourselves the feelings that this wonder of love must create in our hearts so that we may appreciate it more and more, loving God only and nothing but him.

Jesus Christ is our King and Lawgiver. It is he who will save us, says the Holy Scripture. Let us acknowledge him under these titles; let us submit to his laws, but let us beware of expecting our reward in this world in temporal favors; let us raise our eyes to the Kingdom where Jesus Christ reigns with his chosen ones for all eternity.

Jesus Christ is our Mediator: He has begun this work from the first moment of his Incarnation and he has never ceased. St. Paul says, "He lives for ever to make intercession for us before the Father."

Jesus Christ is our Brother: He himself has given us this glorious title. "We are his co-inheritors," says St. John the beloved disciple. What love the Father has for us! He wishes us to bear the name of children of God, and to be that in fact.

Jesus Christ is our Model: Look at the example that our Savior has shown us since his childhood. Let your thoughts, your desires, your words, your opinions, your actions, your tastes, and your inclinations all be regulated by him. He is, by particular choice, your Spouse. By virtue of a sacred pact, Jesus Christ has contracted the closest alliance with you in being united with you by the bonds of a wonderful love, and he endows you with his most precious possessions. O, may your hearts thrill at his sweet name. Render to this divine Spouse love for love. Always treasure the faith that you have vowed to him. Like the angels that always long to see him more and more, ever seek his divine presence; stimulate your zeal, your purity, and persevere in your aspirations. Renew frequently and with the greatest generosity the offering of yourselves.

Let us unite with the spirit of the Church, and make haste to prepare ourselves for the solemn feast of Christmas, in the hope of receiving a greater abundance of gifts from heaven on this holy day.

Let us earnestly, and with faith, ask this kind Savior, to be with us more and more in our meditations, in our communions, in our exercises, that he may deign to fill our spirits with an abundance of light; give to our memory a keener recollection of his favors, and fill our hearts with a more generous and effective love, that he may unite us so intimately to himself that we may be but one with him, so that we may say with Saint Paul, "I live, no, not I, but Jesus Christ lives in me."

Abandon yourselves, my children, to these holy transports (raptures). It is a sure way to arrive at those dispositions which our Savior asks in order to make you instruments of his mercy, and to obtain this union with your divine Spouse, to which your vocation calls you, and to which the goodness of Jesus Christ admits you, first here in his church militant, and afterwards in the abode of his triumph and his eternal happiness.

(In letter #5-10, addressed to Madam Catherine Dal, dated December 10, 1837, the founder writes, "I am sending you a few reflections for Advent that I beg you to get copied so that the Very Reverend Mother can take them to Alost and elsewhere.)

The Circumcision

It is impossible, Reverend Mother, for me to reply to all the letters that filial affection, gratitude, or other good dispositions of the heart have moved my children in Jesus Christ to write to me. However greatly I may desire to converse with each one of them in particular, I find myself obliged to address the Superiors to thank these dear daughters for the New Year wishes which they have sent to their spiritual Father, and to assure them that I have prayed with all my heart for the requests which I had to make on their behalf to the new-born Savior; to our Savior suffering humiliations, and painful circumcision, and to the Savior adored and acknowledged by the Magi. Ah! Reverend Mother, what a wonderful instructions our dear Jesus gives us in these three different aspects I have just mentioned.

Who can presume to say that the law of God, that our Rule, that the obligations of obedience are too difficult when one realizes that the Son of God has submitted willingly for us, to a custom which was never made for him, an operation which caused his blood to flow, which compared him to the guilty children of Adam, and which humbled him to such a degree that he appeared a sinner?

Following the example of our divine Spouse, my dear children, love the law of God, love your Rule; love the obligations of obedience more than your health, more than your rest, more than your honor and your reputation. Love the knife of spiritual circumcision for Jesus Christ's sake. Make use of it with courage, first against what you find wrong in yourself, then against what is imperfect or useless. Cut then, sever all dissipations which appear to resist the will of God; remember that spiritual circumcision is the essential characteristic of the child of God, the spouse of Jesus Christ; that without its help you can neither observe your rules, nor follow your divine Spouse, nor obtain the sweet proofs that he is pleased with you. Courage, then, my dear daughters, and may the sight of the blood of Jesus Christ stimulate your zeal.

Without doubt, then, we must fulfill all our duties. The example of Jesus Christ, who does not dispense himself from the law of circumcision, inspires us with a tender and sincere affection for obedience; it makes us practice all our rules with courage and punctuality. No, generous Savior, it shall never be said that the slave refuses to submit when he sees his Lord obey and humiliate himself; it is not just that the spouse refuse to carry the burden that her Spouse carries with her.

It is by the authority of Jesus Christ and in his name that all lawgivers have instituted their laws. Your rules are his work. It is he who has, in a certain sense, dictated them; he has sanctioned them. They include briefly the particular precepts which he has made for you; these are his particular orders to you. It will not be difficult for you my dear children, to have esteem for your Rules and it will naturally follow that you will love them, and observe them generously in all their points.

You are in truth, a chosen race; you are a holy nation, a people whom Jesus Christ has won. You do not belong to yourself any longer. You have cost the Savior his precious blood. It is, then, his just right that he should rule over you by your Rules.

Oh! It cannot be difficult for you, at least, it can never be impossible to respond to the views of this divine Master, this good King, this tender Spouse, has for each one of you in particular. You will fix your eyes on Jesus, St. Paul says, "the author and consummator of the faith, your lawgiver, your model." His example will prevent you from falling into discouragement by strengthening you against distaste for the most embarrassing observances. Your obedience, your punctuality, have not caused your blood to flow as it has that of Jesus; but even if it should go as far as that, you will not forget your duties nor your rights, nor the example of your Savior.

Oh. Lord, enlighten at all times the minds of these spouses, make them understand your law so that they may observe it always with all their heart, and as you expect it to be observed.

There, very dear Daughters, this is what I believe I must write to all of you. I hope that you will find in this the thoughts which should animate those who meditate on the life of Jesus Christ, and you will find there, I am sure, that desire to see you perfect and happy which you always found in

Your very devoted spiritual Father
C. G. Van Crombrughe, Canon

Ghent, Jan. 3, 1836

What We Owe to the Lord Jesus - Gratitude, Love

Jesus Christ is equal with his Father. "All that the Father does, the Son does also." Recall to your mind the wonders of the creation of the world and that multitude of wonders that God is always producing in heaven and on earth. From this general consideration, comes a detailed one of what concerns you personally and recall to mind what Jesus Christ has bestowed on you, first in the order of nature, and secondly in the order of grace.

1. As God, Jesus Christ has given you life, and has taken care of you up to the present moment. You owe to him your bodily gifts, good health, strength, and other qualities, sight, hearing, speech, etc. None of these come from yourself; you cannot then glorify in them. It is he who has endowed you with the blessings of mind, intelligence, memory, judgment, and all the other qualities of the mind. Have you received two talents, five talents? You must thank him for them; it is in his service that you must use them. Do you take care to not deprive him of anything, and to do him homage in all circumstances? Everything that is good in your character, straight-forwardness, common sense, generosity, courage, all come from the munificence of Jesus Christ; only the wrong is your work. In spoiling the gifts of God you yourself have made the faults you find within yourself. God is the author of good; do you show him sufficient thanks? You have made the evil that is in you, do you humiliate yourself? You owe to the goodness of Jesus Christ the blessings of prosperity; you owe to his mercy the perhaps still greater blessing of adversity. O Jesus, how can I repay you for so much liberality? "By using them in my service," replies the Man-God.

2. All the blessings in the order of grace come to you through Jesus your Savior. The Christian vocation, baptism, the faith which is the beginning of your salvation, the foundation of your justification; the justification which is the happy change from the state of sin to the state of grace by adoption as a child of God by our Savior Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ who has rescued you from the power of the devil and who has given you the inheritance of God. It is at the price of his blood that he has delivered you and redeemed you. It is also to this same Jesus Christ that you owe the graces you received at your First Communion. If you have kept your baptismal innocence, it is to Jesus Christ that you owe it; if you have sullied it, it is to Jesus Christ that you owe your reconciliation, your robe of regeneration.

Recall to your memory all the other spiritual favors that you have received up to the time that you entered religion (the religious life) and rouse in yourself the keenest sentiments of sincere gratitude. But who can make you understand, if not Jesus Christ himself, the graces which he gave you in calling you to the supreme honor of becoming his spouse? ... from a slave of the devil to become a child of the mercy of God! That is a lot. To abandon the service of the best of Masters, and then to become again a friend of this same Master, that is almost incomprehensible; but to become his spouse, the spouse of this God who has been abandoned, and to whom one has dared to say by actions, "Depart from me, I do not want you any longer." Ah! Who can make us understand this wonder? To become a spouse of Jesus Christ, to be admitted into the intimacy of the heart of this Savior, to drink there long draughts of this delicious wine which kindles in your heart the love of purity, which enraptures you, making you despise all created things to cling to God alone; to live the life of his grace, and by his wonderful union with you, which is like the union of the branches with the trunk of the tree, is not this to live in God, and to have within you the mind and feelings of Jesus Christ, just as the branches receive the living sap of the tree?

Count, if you can, the ordinary and extraordinary graces which your divine Spouse has bestowed on you; good sentiments, pious thoughts, prayers, meditations, mutual edification, instructions, works of charity, teaching others to know God, their creator, their Savior, and thus to do a good work which will continue, perhaps, until the end of the world. Oh, wonderful favor! Have we ever understood it sufficiently, or appreciated it enough?

Oh my soul, ask then, in your weakness, that Jesus may tell you what you should do for him to show your gratitude; may he deign to put into your heart the sentiments which he wishes to see there. Lord Jesus, divine Spouse, my mind and my heart can express no more. May you be in all and may all be in you.

Read from the Imitation of Christ: Book II, Chapter 7; Book III, Chapter 10.

The Union of Jesus Christ with Us

"Behold, I am with you always, even to the consummation of the world" (Matthew 28). Jesus Christ remains truly and constantly with his Church until the end of the world, not only as God, but also as man.

1. By the interior outpouring of his Spirit which gives to our souls the life of grace, the impulse of good works, and the increase in Christian virtue. "I am the vine," say the Lord, "you are the branches. The one who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit... As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." (John 15). Jesus Christ is with us as the vine in its branches, as the leader in his members (followers) whom he animates, whom he vivifies by the constant influence of virtue and grace. Union for me, a spouse of Jesus Christ, is so real, so intimate, as to make with him but one interior and spiritual body.

O my soul, guard carefully the dependence, proportion and harmony which there must be between us and the divine Spouse. Let us have his tastes, his sentiments, his thoughts, his desires.

2. Jesus Christ remains here below with us by the particular help which he gives to his Church in general:

(i) To keep intact the sacred deposit of the faith;

(ii) To govern the faithful, and to lead them by sure paths to the goal which he has appointed for his chosen ones.

For each one of us in particular, with what attention has he not searched for us, perhaps even when we were not thinking of it! With what tenderness has he not invited us to follow him, and how kindly he rules and watches over us! He is with our Superiors; he is in them to direct us; he is at the same time with us and in us to help us obey with simplicity, with love, with perseverance.

Jesus Christ is with us in whatever our duty to direct us, to lessen our difficulties for us, to ease the troubles which threaten to overwhelm us in some difficult or dangerous situation. Yes, Jesus Christ is with us and he is attentive to all our steps. He sees them, notes them and remembers them. What a powerful incentive for us to give all our actions, even the most ordinary, the perfection of which we are capable.

3. Lastly, the third way in which our divine Spouse is with us is in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, a sacramental presence in which he continues in a certain manner, the life he lived formerly with his disciples. Then, Jesus Christ was only in one place, but now he multiplies himself, so to speak, in as many places as there are faithful followers. He is always in our churches, and often in our own hearts. During the time that he lived with men before his passion, he did not communicate to them virtue and merit more abundantly. In our time he gives us both with an admirable abundance of blessings and graces. Those who had the happiness of approaching his adorable person had, it is true, the supreme happiness of rejoicing in his divine presence. We, in Holy Communion, have still more; we unite ourselves so closely, so intimately with him that we are but one with him, the wonderful result of God's love!

It is very true, then, O Jesus, that in ascending to your heavenly Father, you have solved the problem of living at the same time with us. St. John Chrysostom rightly tells us that we should not envy those who had the privilege of seeing the Lord in the world, since, more fortunate than they, we not only see him, we possess him and he gives himself to us as our nourishment. O my soul let us never cease thanking Jesus Christ for such generosity.

Let us never forget that he is with us, that we have no need to cross seas and deserts to meet him; everywhere this divine Spouse comes to us, in our neighbors, ... in our Sisters who are his spouses, ... in our Superiors, ... in ourselves, ... in our chapel in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Let us confide to him our body and soul, and all our affairs. No, Jesus will never disappoint our hopes; he will not abandon our interests. Let us often renew the sacrifices which we have made of ourselves.

Read from the Imitation of Christ, Book II, Chapter 8.

**On the Love of Jesus Christ for us and on the
Obligation of Repaying him by Observing the Rule**

"As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you." (John 15,19) What happiness, what glory, what consolation, to be able to say with conviction Jesus Christ loves me; yes, I am the object of his love, of a love that is most pure, most ardent and most effective.

"Live in my love." Jesus Christ wishes that our love should respond to his, and that it should be sincere, active and persevering. The way to give these characters (qualities) to our love is to keep his commandments faithfully. "If you keep my commandments," he tells us, "you live in my love." These commandments for you are your Rule, the desires of your Superiors. If you conform yourself to them courageously, you live in the love of Jesus Christ.

Since the love that the Son has for his Father is the cause, the measure, the pattern of the love which he has for us, is it not also right that he should be the cause, measure and model of the love which we have for him? A supernatural love, an unlimited love, that my beloved is the love that I wish to have for you.

"I will no longer call you servants, but friends, because all things I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15,25) The majority of the faithful, occupied with worldly affairs, and often with little attraction for the things of God, can pass at most only as servants of Jesus Christ; but you whom he has destined by particular choice to the knowledge of his mysteries, and to whom he reveals his secrets of the interior life, you are his friends, his confidants. What a privilege! What a signal grace! Be attentive to the slightest signs of this divine friend. Keep very close to him. Study his inclinations continually, love above all to converse with him, to be zealous in his interests, to attract other faithful servants to him, and to make for him new friends. That is what he expects of your zeal, of your fidelity.

"I have chosen you, and have appointed you, that you should go and should bring forth fruit," says the Lord (John 15). Such was his desire when he made you enter his family, to elevate you to the rank of his very dear friends. He intended to find in you persons devoted to his interests, to procure his glory, to console him by your zeal in imitating his virtues, in extending his kingdom.

Can it be that Jesus Christ made a mistake in choosing you? No, Jesus Christ can never make a mistake. ... Man can be unfaithful, he can be ungrateful and fail to correspond to the love of the divine Savior, he may refuse to participate in the plans made for him; put obstacles to his grace, and not bring forth the fruits of life, the root of which is eternal charity, and which serves at all times of trial. Man can do that, but Jesus Christ does not make a mistake.

O Lord, grant that such a misfortune may never come to the children of Mary, your Mother, who is also ours, and who loves us with a love of predilection. We do not wish to resist your grace, and we wish to prove by our conduct that you did not make a mistake in choosing us. No, we will never be ungrateful! "We will keep your commandments and thus live in your love."

It is to your Rule; it is to Jesus Christ that you must look for your consolations. "Come to me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you," says Jesus Christ. (Matthew 11) It is without doubt that he will receive us in the bosom of his mercy when, humiliated under the weight of our miseries, and crushed with our sins, we dare to apply to our divine Savior. However, this is not enough for this good Master, this is not enough for his heart. Not content with always welcoming us with open arms when we return to you, O dear Jesus, you make the first advances yourself; you come to meet us, you search diligently for us. You rouse us with tenderness; with ardor you invite us to come to you. "Come, come to me," you tell us. O tender friend! O generous Spouse! O merciful God! O prodigy of divine love! God himself wishes to wipe away our tears; he comes, he offers to help us, to renew our strength.

Who can refuse these tender efforts of the God Savior? Who would dare to insult him by looking for other means of comfort or to have recourse to others rather than to him to find rest for their soul? All consolation found elsewhere than in you divine Spouse is ineffective; it is false, and the spouse who allows herself to do this forgets her divine Spouse. Ponder over this truth, you who are united to Jesus Christ so closely by sacred ties.

"Take my yoke upon you and you shall find rest for your souls," adds the good Savior (Matthew 11). What does it mean to submit to the yoke of Jesus Christ? It is for all to acknowledge

his doctrine, to follow his example, to live according to the Gospel. For you, Children of Mary, it is to submit to the Rule he has given you, to follow it in all its points, and to love it with all your heart; it is to esteem, to venerate it with all your soul as a pledge of the love of Jesus Christ for you and your love for him has confirmed between you, uniting you mutually by indissoluble ties. That is the yoke of Jesus Christ for you, that is the expression of the will of your divine Spouse. It is in your Rule and according to the spirit of your Rule that you will always find what God asks of you, both in particular and in general. Apart from that, you open yourself to illusions, to the dangers of seduction. Apart from that there is no safe way for you, and however good other ways may appear to be, mistrust them, they will surely lead you over the precipice.

The Gospels are the guide for all Christians; the Daughters of Mary and Joseph possess a second, it is the Rule. The way of salvation for all is the Gospel; and for the last (the Daughters of Mary and Joseph) the way of salvation is their Rule.

The Resurrection *

I have come from saying Holy Mass and you can feel that my joy, at the remembrance of the triumph of our amiable Savior, is not by any way mediocre. I fulfill my duty of coming among you to rejoice with all of you at the feast which brings universal joy to the Church.

All is now completed, my dear daughters. The decree of our condemnation exists no longer. The blood of Jesus Christ has destroyed it. He is our ransom! Our debts are paid; heaven is reconciled with earth. Jesus Christ is risen; death and hell are conquered; they can do no more to him. Truly it is a happy day that the Lord has made. Let us celebrate it with all the joy and happiness of which we are capable.

Let us thank Jesus Christ that we have shared with him his humiliations and his sufferings; that by his grace we have renounced the world and sin, and we have obtained, with him, this important victory over death and the devil. Let us rejoice with this gentle and peaceful conqueror. Let us abandon our souls to raptures of a great joy, a holy joy, and one which expresses the feelings with which our hearts should be filled today.

Jesus Christ risen is also the model of our resurrection. "Once risen, he dies no more," say St. Paul. We must be firm in the resolutions we have made. We must unite ourselves more and more intimately with our divine Spouse by recollection, meditation, and self-forgetfulness which make us so dear to the Heart of Jesus, and at the same time so useful to our neighbor. In all our needs may our customary refuge be the thought of our beloved Savior who sees us, protects us, and hides us in his wounds, those glorious trophies of his victory.

May you be happy, my dear Children, to be always with Jesus; to work solely with him and for him. Your Rule and the voice of your Superiors show you in an unmistakable way what your divine Spouse asks of you on all occasions. Be, then, very submissive and courageous, and you will accompany the God Savior from triumph to triumph until you come to be admitted to the uninterrupted contemplation of his unveiled presence.

Your devoted spiritual Father

C. G. Van Crombrughe, Canon

Ghent, Easter Day, 1836

* Same as Letter 6-34 addressed to Mme Olympiade

The Presentation of Mary

The feast of the Presentation of Mary is a day so important for you that I cannot resist the desire which urges me to speak to you for a moment. It gives you, in effect, a simple occasion of repairing those faults, which, by human frailty, you have committed against the great obligations imposed on you by your holy vows.

We have not always shown entire confidence, absolute devotion and true zeal in the interests of the divine Spouse. There have been those moments of slackness, of want of recollection which, on occasion, have caused certain interior trials, of which the heart, that home of Jesus Christ, has suffered regrettably. There has been too much of self to the detriment of the divine Spouse. Perhaps some part of the heart has been profaned, either in loving one's ease, or one's own desires, or something other than Jesus, and that which he tells us to love. Lastly, perhaps there has not always been that submission to all the wishes, the admirable wishes of the Lord our God.

Well, my dear Children, the ardor of your sentiments in renewing the sacred pledge contracted before the holy Altar will make these stains disappear, and will compensate your Spouse for those moments of coldness which have hurt him, and chilled the tender urging of his divine charity in our souls.

Courage, then, very dear Children, stimulate your hearts to a redoubling of love. Let there be no limits to your generosity in the sacrifice which you are about to renew, no doubts, no distrust, but a lively faith, unlimited devotion and you will find that Jesus Christ will never be outdone in generosity. Dare, with your Mother and model, to put no limits to abandoning yourselves, and you will be free in God, rich in God, and always happy in God.

"Truly, I say to you," says Jesus Christ, those who has left all for my sake who shall receive a hundred times as much, now in this time, and in the world to come, life everlasting." What magnificent generosity on the part of your Master! You see he does not wait until the next world to recompense you for your sacrifices. From this present time he gives you proof of his promises by letting you enjoy a hundredfold of all that you have left for love of him. This sweet peace of soul, and interior joy accompanies you, and proclaims itself outwardly by a contented expression which is often the object of envy on the part of people of the world.

There, happy victims of divine love, is the hundredfold which is promised you. Yet, however precious these blessings may be, there are but pledges of those which await you in heaven. Your happiness here will consist, not in being exempt from things contrary to your inclinations, but in the generous acceptance of all that God allows in your regard. There is that happiness which consists in the possession of God in our place of exile, until we shall have him in the abode of eternal joy, where nothing can trouble further the unchangeable happiness of his chosen ones.

To obtain for you the dispositions which give you these happy results, I shall offer the holy sacrifice of the Mass for eight days for all the members of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. I beg in return that each one of these religious, who are all my children in God, will recommend me to the mercy of their divine Spouse on the day of the renewal of their vows.

Your very devoted Father in Jesus Christ,
C. G. Van Crombrugghe, Canon

Ghent, November 13, 1835

The Mystery of the Incarnation

Every day of the year we honor the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the divine Word; it is to this end that we recite the prayer of the Angel of the Lord. Yet, the time of Advent is a period which recalls to us the sweet and consoling duty of offering in a special way our profound homage to this wonderful work of our redemption.

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word." These admirable words spoken by Mary are particularly striking to me. It seems to me that they contain some great lessons for all, but above all for you, Children of Mary, called to walk with active zeal in the footsteps of this august Mother.

Admire first the perfect resignation of Mary to all that God desires. "I am the handmaid of the Lord," and as such I accept respectfully all that he is pleased to require of me; I wish to serve him, to work and suffer for him. I courageously accept all that is difficult, laborious, and painful, in the function that the Lord assigns to me. It is the Lord who speaks to me. May his word be done in me, I submit myself without reserve.

Learn here, my dear Daughters, the true manner of submitting yourselves always to everything that God asks of you, whatever may be the way that you arrive at the knowledge of his adorable will. Admire also the obedience of your perfect model. She is prompt, humble and sincere. Mary ignores the subterfuges of self-love, of an unmortified will. When God's will is known, she hastens to agree to it. "Be it done to me according to your word." No consideration can restrain for an instant the assent of a will which she had sacrificed long ago to the love of her God. "Behold your handmaid, Lord!" Such is her reply. How many questions she might have asked the angel about herself, and about Saint Joseph, and on the circumstances and results of this ineffable mystery? But, as a submissive daughter, Mary is satisfied with what God reveals to her, and she leaves all the rest to his providence.

The exterior of Mary, says Saint Ambrose, was always the simple expression of her beautiful soul, and the faithful image of the excellent virtues which she cultivated in her heart. With what modesty and sweet serenity she pronounces those words which so well depict her soul: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word."

What lessons, my dear Daughters, are included in this reply of Mary! Meditate on them well, fix them deeply in your hearts, and while honoring the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, you will form yourselves to the highest virtues. Obedience will be a fruitful source of happiness and merit; resignation to the good pleasure of God will change seemingly difficult things into pleasures, and you will distinguish in everything this lively and humble faith, this firm hope, and this ardent charity which distinguishes the chosen ones and makes them saints.

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word." O Mary, show us that you are our Mother; recommend us to your Son. And you, my Children, show that you are the Daughters of Mary.

Such as the best wishes that come from a heart that loves you, the heart of your spiritual
Father
Ghent, December 14, 1834

C. G. Van Crombrughe, Canon

The Guardian Angels

"Are not all the angels spirits sent to exercise their ministry for the sake of those who inherit salvation?" (Heb.1, 14).

Let us adore the love of God who gives to each one in particular one of these exalted spirits, who are closely united to him in the realms of his glory. A minister from his kingdom, a prince of heaven, is charged with care for me! "He has given his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways." (Ps. 90,2)

"My angel is with you" (Baruch 6,6). Let us have a high opinion of our soul, since God has confided it to the care of an angel. "How great is the dignity of our souls, since each is confided to the care of an angel from the first moment of its existence." (St. Jerome on Matt. 18)

The angels are our friends; they are enlightened, merciful friends. They warn us kindly of our duties; they vary their advice, their instructions according to our needs. They choose a favorable opportunity to enlighten our hearts with the truth. Let us remember the reproaches of our heavenly friend in such and such a circumstance, when we give way to this or that passion, when we are exposed to some misfortune or other, to this or that sin.

1. When, deceived by the evil inclinations of our corrupt nature, we contemplate doing something wrong, we brood over some black thought, some dangerous desire, does not our angel make us hear in the depths of our heart, those words which were said to Lot: arise, leave that thought, give up that project, for fear lest you perish in the wickedness of the town.

When, resisting their efforts, the light of reason, the teachings of faith, we fall, then their prayers, their charitable solicitude make a kind of gentle assault, as it did to Lot who lingered, and whom the angels took by the hand to draw him away from danger. Be very thankful for the signs of friendship that you have received from this charitable friend. Never refuse his demands.

2. They are our guardians in this life so full of dangers. What consolation to know that always, everywhere, in every circumstance, an angel has the charge of guarding and protecting us. "He has given his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways." An angel is with me, and watches over me to keep far from me dangers of body and soul, and to shield me from the evils of time and of eternity.

My Guardian Angel watches over me, like a pilgrim in this foreign land; he pities me, and, obeying the orders of God, he lends me his aid, so that one day I may reach with him our native land, where I may satiate myself like him, at the divine source of Truth for eternity. (St. Augustine)

What confidence we should have in this saintly guide and friend! What reverence we should show him! Always and on all occasions let us watch over our mind and heart so that no thought or act should displease our Guardian Angel, our inseparable companion whom nothing escapes.

3. The angels are our protectors, our advocates before God. Burning with zeal for our salvation, my holy angel is constantly recommending me to divine mercy; he implores the help of grace for me from my Savior Jesus Christ, and my dear holy Mother Mary, the Queen of Angels. He pleads my cause with an enthusiasm which I can understand only very imperfectly. Who can tell of the care with which he offers to God my prayers, my good thoughts, my good actions? How he welcomes my good ideas, and pleads for the help of which I am in need to persevere in the right path.

Do you recall pious inclination experienced on certain occasions ... desires to please God ... that earnest desire to love God and make others love him ...? It is perhaps to your Guardian Angel that you owe all that. Stimulate in yourself then, a tender devotion. Love this excellent protector sincerely; have recourse to him in all your difficulties.

Second Part - Practical Conclusions

Following St. Bernard's advice (Sermon 11 and 12), have confidence in the care that your Guardian Angel has for you, reverence him since he is with you, and have great devotion for him, a real love, for he is so good to you.

1. We must have confidence in our holy Guardian Angel. Can we doubt his power before God? He who remained faithful, and who is attached to his Creator by an inseparable love, but loving us with a love as strong as we know him to have for us, can we doubt his protection? Let us rely, then, on the help of our holy Angel, and in all our difficulties let us have recourse to him. We shall experience the effects of our pious confidence. Do not insult him by doubting his power or goodness. Let us only distrust ourselves, but let us have for our Guardian Angel a confidence based on what religion teaches us of his high prerogatives and on the relations which divine mercy has established between us since our birth.

2. Let us have a true and profound respect for our Angel. Wherever you may be, remember that you are not alone. An angel is with you. What a fruitful source of instruction we have in this truth! (They are) always a witness to our thoughts, words and actions. What a powerful check and strong barrier against the most violent temptations! Who can be audacious enough to do in the presence of a prince of heaven what he would not do before a respectable person, a priest, or a master?

3. Let us have a sincere devotion, a tender affection for our angel, this friend so zealous, so attentive to all our needs, who is never tired either of our miseries or the care we exact. Let us then pay attention to his advice and profit by his goodness; let us be docile and thereby show him that we know how to appreciate his care. Never contradict him by sentiments or attachments unworthy of a Christian, of a religious, of a visible guardian angel of children who are themselves accompanied by their holy Angels; then we shall win what the Lord promises in Holy Scripture: "If you listen to the voice of your angel, and do what I command you, I will be the enemy of your enemies, and I will afflict those who afflict you" (Ecc. 23,22).

Let us conclude from this how precious our soul is, and how we should watch over it, and strive to adorn it, since a prince of heaven does not refuse it his thoughtful care. What must not also be done for others, for those whom God has confided to us?

Here make suitable generous resolutions.

Love of Peace

"Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt. 5,9). Had our divine Master assigned no other reward than peace itself to the zeal which he urges us to have for it, we should be well repaid for all that it costs us to obtain it, and to keep it.

1. There is no greater good in the world, rather, there is no other good possible without it; riches, pleasures, honors, are the good things for the body; rest, good harmony, and peace are the blessings of the mind, which make us happy. Privation, sorrows, crosses become bearable and even light when peace reigns in the soul; while advantages, no matter how great, lose their attraction, and are not enjoyed if those who have them are not at peace.

2. In the merciful designs of God, sweet peace is the end (object) of our vocation; the multiplicity of graces which come to us, and which we recall at every moment, make us enjoy peace by destroying sin in us and by establishing the reign of Jesus Christ, the supremely peaceful king. Does he not promise to those who renounce all to follow him, his peace which surpasses in sweetness everything that one can think of?

3. Peacemakers are called the children of God, and in bearing this glorious title:

(i) They resemble the Father, whose thoughts are always of peace; the Son who obtained it by his death; the Holy Spirit who keeps it in us by the charity which he puts into our heart.

(ii) Peaceful souls have a particular attraction for God, and God loves to live in them, because he guides them without resistance (from them).

(iii) They have a just right to the divine heritage which is the reign of the same peace which Jesus Christ came to establish in his Church on earth. This peace, which we obtain here below by our work, and by the virtue of our divine Spouse, is the pledge, the foretaste of that which we shall enjoy eternally with God in our heavenly home.

4. Let us love peace, let us procure it, if needs be, at the greatest cost. Let us keep it with the utmost care; let us fear to do it the slightest harm; rather than break the sacred tie which must unite children of the same Father, let us suffer all, let us dissimulate all, yield in everything that conscience does not forbid us to hide or to yield.

5. To have peace with God, let us not cease to quiet (pacify) our conscience more and more, and to work at submitting ourselves in everything to his most holy will. Let us not permit our souls to be troubled. Let us remember that Jesus Christ has taken up his abode there; let us be on our guard not to forget that under any circumstance.

To have peace with our neighbor, let us remember what our holy Rule says on this subject. Let us practice kindness toward everybody and never forget for a single instant the great obligations of Christian patience.

To have peace with ourselves, let us accustom ourselves to the obligations which humility imposes upon us, confidence in Jesus Christ and let us remember the particular obligations which we have undertaken to mortify ourselves. The example of our divine Spouse cannot fail to make an impression on our hearts. What zeal he had for this three-fold peace? All his life on earth is one succession of acts of submission to his Father's will. With what gentleness, what kindness he treats his apostles, the Jews, and even Judas himself? How perseveringly he reproves their fears and natural desires! There, then, is your model.

But from whence do your troubles come? Go back to the source of these dissensions. What was it? asks St. James. They are the unmortified passions of your heart which you allow to rule. Make the resolution to fight them courageously. Peace is obtained through war.

O Jesus, peaceful king, Prince of Peace, give peace to my soul, give it to this house, and to all your holy church.

Reading from the Imitation of Jesus Christ, Book II, Chapter 3.

Reciprocal Affection

Here, my dear Daughters are some remarks on the affection you should have for one another. It is a reading taken from the writings of St. Francis de Sales which has supplied me with my material, and inspired me to address to you.

"Love one another as I have loved you," said our divine Master. Yes, my dear daughters, Jesus Christ has loved us with a real and effective love, a persevering and truly cordial love. That then is how you must love one another. That is to say, much more by deeds than by words, so that imperfections or even faults do not diminish your mutual affection for it must come from God, and lead to God, and consequently it must be cordial, that is to say, it must come from the heart.

But, my dear Daughters, this cordial love must be accompanied by two other virtues, as St. Francis de Sales remarked: affability and polite (good) conversation. Affability spreads a kind of sweetness on serious communications which one must have one for another. Polite conversation gives grace and pleasure to less serious conversation and to recreation.

1. The virtue of affability compels you, my very dear Daughters, to maintain a happy medium between being too serious and too frivolous; between too little and too great demonstrations of affection and esteem. You must show mutual signs of affection and esteem toward each other, but without too much familiarity and without losing that holy reserve in your expressions and your simple embraces.

In certain circumstances, it would be poor grace not to be affectionate. You would be blameworthy, for example, if you maintained such an austere dignity in the presence of the sick as you would elsewhere. However, caresses and expressions of esteem occurring too frequently or given without sufficient cause, become meaningless and no longer produce the happy effects of mutual charity. There must be moderation, but there must also be a great deal of simplicity.

2. The virtue of polite conversation requires that one contribute in holy and moderate joy to these gracious conversations which recreate, refresh and console one's neighbor. Is it not above all among the spouses of the innocent lamb that this virtue should shine with all its brilliance? Jesus Christ resting in their hearts communicates his kindness and divine peace to them. Always watch, then, my dear Daughters, that no passion trouble the resting place of your heavenly Spouse. Avoid in your recreations taciturnity, rudeness and also talkativeness and chatter. Let the time of recreation endear you one with another by evidences of mutual support and by the mutual outpouring of sentiments of esteem and friendship which always animate you.

May the sweet love of God predominate over all other sentiments that you may experience, and thus you will go away pleased with one another, and more kindly disposed toward the more serious duties which await you after recreation. Avoid those manners and expressions which are not permitted by good education, and by the refined feelings which religious must always have. On the other hand, your affable and engaging manner, and your modest and easy appearance will be powerful helps in diffusing the sweet fragrance of Jesus Christ and in keeping you intimately united to this heavenly Spouse, a fruitful source of blessing in this life, and of merit in heaven.

Receive, my very dear Daughters, these observations with as much kindness as I have had the pleasure in writing them to you.

Your ever devoted spiritual Father,
C. G. Van Crombrughe

Ghent, January 29, 1834

Affection for our Superiors, our Sisters and our Students *

The last conversation I had with you, my very dear Daughters, suggested to me the idea of giving you some rules on the very important subject of the affection you should have for your Superiors, your Sisters and your students.

The foundation of your love for creatures should be the love of God. Well, my children, by the grace of the Savior, divine love reigns in your hearts. Yes, Jesus Christ possesses your souls, and it is in him that you wish to love all whom you love. May the divine love regulate all the love that you have for creatures. If in truth it were not thus, or that you loved them otherwise, you would be seeking your self-interest, and natural inclinations, that is to say, your self-love, and not that of the good God nor your neighbor.

The way to love reasonably, and at the same time in a saintly way is to love according to God, that is to love God in everything that we love. God wishes us to love our Superiors, our Sisters, the children confided to our care. Therefore, let us love God in them first, and afterwards the relations that God has established between these persons and ourselves, and the good qualities which he has bestowed upon them; but through submission to God, let us also bear with those shortcomings which they have.

When one only loves because one is loved in return, our jealous self-love, very exacting, mistrusts the object of its affections; it soon observes the blemishes of the creature; it is troubled, offended, it suspects; it often goes so far as to end in aversion because its passion finds itself mistaken in its petty calculations for love in return.

On the other hand, when one loves according to God, and not in this mean selfish way, one loves the creature patiently in spite of its imperfections. Absolute perfection is to be found in God alone; we cannot exact it from any creature, but we must love in each one the amount of goodness of perfection she has received. To believe otherwise would be to offend God, the author of these gifts. He has distributed them as he pleases.

Lastly, we must love every creature according to the ties, more or less binding, by which God has united them to us. It is on this principle, my dear Daughters, that you should have much more love for a Superior than for a Sister, more for a Sister than for a student, but more for the last than for any other person whom God has not placed in as close a relationship.

If you love God for himself, and for love of him you love all that contain his gifts, all who represent him more or less directly, and lastly all whom he wishes you to love, your affections will be pure and sweet, they will be holy; your love will be as unchangeable as its origin which is God, his gifts, or his ever amiable will. It will make you overcome natural aversions, as also natural tendernesses. For it corrects sympathies as well as repugnance, and from the depths of the heart as from a furnace where the divine fire purifies all, it diffuses over the senses an indescribable sweetness which makes easy the practice of charity, and which makes you all things to all people, not by demonstrations of agreement but by the abandoning of a soul as loving as it is amiable.

That is the way I wish you to love, and what I ask for all of you from him who is all love, and whose most ardent desire is to see our hearts burning with his divine flames.

It is in this God of charity that I wish to be

Your very devoted spiritual Father,
C. G. Van Crombrughe

Ghent, December 28, 1836

* Same as Letter 20-3

Purity of Zeal - Jealousy

"The disciples of John said, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him. John answered and said, no one can receive anything except what has been given him from heaven. ... So, this joy of mine has been made complete. He must increase, I must decrease." (John 3, 26-30)

The disciples of John the Baptist, envying the crowds of people who followed Jesus Christ to be baptized, and jealous of the glory which seemed to come to the Savior, complain to their master in bitter tones. It seems wrong to them that Jesus should enter the ministry which their master had exercised with so much success and they suffer to see another share this honor with him.

There is the characteristic of envy, and the effect of this vice, mean and base as it is, sometimes makes us its puppets even in the most holy occupations. Are you always on your guard against feelings of jealousy which so easily insinuate themselves into the human heart? Are you vexed at the praises given to your Sister? Does it trouble you to see in others the gifts and qualities which are lacking in you? Are you secretly annoyed at the success attained by a Sister in the work she has done? Go over in great detail this matter with yourself and see, without flattering yourself, the practical consequences of envy. Do not hide your weakness, and to fortify yourself against a subtle vice much more prevalent than is supposed, inquire of yourself if you are:

1. Quite convinced that God is the Master of his gifts. Has not God the right to distribute his gifts to whom he pleases? If you love the Lord well, you will love his generosity everywhere that he likes to dispense it. If you have a sincere regard for the interests of your divine Spouse, you will feel an equal joy whether he be glorified by you or by another. St. John the Baptist was full of joy that the divine Savior was glorified, and St. Paul declared that he rejoiced at the announcement of Jesus Christ.

2. See if you understand that to envy the endowments of another is in some manner to deprive him of them. Is it not trying to deprive God of the free disposition of his blessings? Must one envy his neighbor for having them? Examine your heart and root out this great evil even to the most minute fiber. Be touched by these words of St. Paul, "Let us not be made desirous of vain glory, provoking one another." (Gal. 5,26)

Besides the insult that your jealousy gives to God, and to your neighbor, the harm it does to yourself is considerable. Another's good, says St. Bernard, becomes after a fashion our own by the joy we take in it. But jealousy deprives you of the share you would have in your Sister's good, causing you to envy her the honor of her good work, whereas you should rejoice at the good she has done.

Is not this way of increasing your merit before God, very pleasing and very sure, since it costs you no trouble and does not expose you to the dangers of pride? Will you continue to deprive yourself of sharing with your Sisters all the good and meritorious acts they do in God's sight? To this end, work seriously in this matter without delay; make yourself destroy in your heart all leanings toward jealousy that you find there. Do not dissimulate your weakness; believe me, you have more than you think at first sight.

Always help me, O my God, to find the wounds in my heart. Without you, my Savior, I could not heal them. Jesus, my divine Spouse, diffuse in the heart of your spouse a ray of that flame which consumes all that is contrary to the love that I should have for you. Amen.

Read from the Imitation of Christ, Book III, Chapter 54.

Relating to Strangers

On the one hand, my Children, you should have toward your Superior the simplicity of a dove, on the other hand you must have the prudence of a serpent toward strangers. An indiscretion or an imprudence may cause you to commit faults very prejudicial to religion or to your Institute.

Always be very circumspect, then, in matters concerning yourself, and others. Carefully avoid thoughtlessness in your words and proceedings. Keep our holy Rule, our customs, and all that is done in community secret, but do this in such a natural way without any air of mystery. In the presence of strangers, speak of your Sisters only with esteem, of your Superiors with respect, and of your students in the most favorable terms.

Curiosity is a very common fault with idle and unmortified people; many have an astonishing skill and facility in satisfying their avidity to know everything, and to discover the secrets of another - a sad and evil propensity of which your inexperience, your natural straightforwardness, your religious simplicity may become victims if you are not armed with discretion before strangers and even before students.

Artful curiosity would extort from you half-avowals supporting prejudices and unjust suspicions; they would flatter you in order to draw your secrets from you. From these alleged triumphs malice would confirm false conjectures, and at the most trifling signs it would form its judgments, draw its conclusions, relate anecdotes either annoying, or even scandalous so as to trouble pious persons, prejudicial to the good of religious, or of your Institute. It is often very difficult, not to say impossible, to stop the circulation of these stories invented by levity and propagated by malice.

Always then, be on your guard with strangers, suspect the tricks of the enemy, and avoid his attacks by your discretion; in most cases do not answer indiscreet or deceitful questions except in an evasive way, or even in such a manner as to make it felt that certain questions are unbecoming. It is the best and often the only way to avoid real faults; to escape dangerous attacks and to cover with a sacred shield the holy things which you must defend against the secret aversion which the world bears toward them.

Watch then; be on your guard on all occasions, but above all, when you find yourself with strangers. Never forget that holy things are for the holy.

Note: The French title for this Instruction is "Rapports avec les Etranges. A French Dictionary translates the word "rapports" as communication, relation, etc. It translates "Etranges" as strangers or outsiders.

On Conversation

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Usually the topic of our conversation is what we are thinking of most, for what is in our hearts comes easily to our lips. Here are certain maxims which will teach you to recognize the predominant affection of your hearts. What do you usually talk about? The response to this question will show your predominant affection.

"What are these discourses that you hold with one another?" asks our divine Master of his apostles overwhelmed by his death on the cross (Luke 24,17). The Son of God is not ignorant of the subject of their conversation, but he likes to hear them explain it, he likes to hear them speak of what he has done for them. He knows how these talks stimulate good affections and exercise virtue.

And you, Children of Mary, you, spouses of Jesus Christ, of what do you prefer to talk? Could you always, without blush, answer your august Mother, your heavenly Spouse? Without lowering your dignity, could you always give an exact account to your superiors of the topic of your conversations? Could you disclose them to your inferiors (subordinates) without shame? Or to your students who see you, as you should be, who know that your heart should be in heaven?

What did you think about at the beginning of your conversion?; during your novitiate?; the year of your profession? And now with your Superiors, your Sisters, your students, do your conversations, which are the echoes of your thoughts, concern pious, or at least eminently useful matters?

Examine if your conversations, simple, modest, holy, serious or playful, are base or are objects of edification, of relief. In a word, the good of your neighbor, or the love of God; or if your self-love, your curiosity, your jealousy, your petty aversions, the spirit of revenge, of spite, a certain levity, and disordinate affection directs your tongue or stimulates your conversation. Do you attempt to discover the secrets of others, to know what they are saying or doing, to know who are such and such persons, and how a certain person fulfills her functions in such and such of our convents?

The result of this examination will be a firm resolution to put your conscience in order. Ask for the light of the Holy Spirit for this; go to your Superior, confide to her simply your discoveries, and faithfully follow the direction you receive.

To sum up, speech is usually the indication of the character of the spirit which animates you. Do the affairs of the world, its maxims, its vanities, usually form the topic of your conversation? Conclude, then, that your mind is influenced by a worldly spirit. If, on the contrary, you speak willingly, frequently, easily of God and of the things of God, then be thankful, for you have grounds for thinking that his spirit rules in you.

Truth Must Rule in all that is Said

Even as Our Lord has forbidden swearing on oath by these words, "Let your speech be thus: Let yes be yes, and no be no. Anything more is from the evil one" (Matthew 5,37), so also has God forbidden all excess in speech which charity, kindness and Christian modesty condemn. Thus an oath, a forcible expression, even affectionate, may be permitted. However, in these cases, which should not be frequent, are excepted, we shall do well to hold ourselves literally to the Gospel precept.

Let us avoid, then, those high-flown expressions which contain exaggeration, enthusiasm, showing unmortified passions only too clearly. Above all, let us avoid a jesting or sharp tone which clashes with the dignity with which we are clothed, and for another reason relates badly with that tone of politeness of which you should always give an example. The most suitable adornment that a religious may give to her speech is simplicity, truth, and candor.

People in the world transgress without scruple this point that Jesus Christ has not judged unworthy of being included in his law; but they condemn its transgression by good people, by ecclesiastics, and by religious.

But whatever may be the world's judgment, we who believe in the person of the Savior, remind ourselves that on the day of judgment we render an account of every idle word we have said (Matthew 12,36). This remembrance will stop vain, flattering, slandering, indiscreet talk that a dissipated soul counts as nothing, but that a true Christian, a sincerely recollected person, regards with St. Bernard as profanity, the least evil of which is that it dries up the heart, the source of grace and devotion. It is not enough, my dear Daughters for us to bridle our tongues, to correct our lapses, and suppress superfluities; we must sanctify the usage of them.

Let us examine carefully in a few words what our Rule teaches us in this matter, and we shall see that to make our tongue the instrument of sanctification we must:

1. Accustom yourselves to speak willingly of God, of religion, of perfection. If the love of God and how to draw closer to him is well in our hearts, we shall not have need to study, nor feel any intense application of the mind, for in speaking often the tongue becomes able to express easily what the heart feels.
2. However pious a foundation your conversations may have, there will be something lacking in them if you do not take care to follow the precept of flavoring them with a gentle, modest, easy, candid and composed manner which diffuses unction (grace) on everything. Avoid always a pretentious tone, levity, as also moroseness and taciturnity. Give everyone the opportunity of simply expressing herself in her turn and as she pleases.
3. The aim of your discourses being:
 - i. To praise God, to make him known, to glorify him.
 - ii. To instruct, edify, revive or console your neighbor.
 - iii. To recover from your fatigue and to re-animate yourself. Curtail all conversation which does not have one of these as its end; it will be at least superfluous, and perhaps blameworthy.

There, my dear Daughters is the manner in which the subject, the course and the object of your conversations will sanctify recreations, and how "by your words you will be acquitted" (Matthew 10,37). Be convinced that this lesson is worth meditating upon, and that we should think over its consequences.

It would be vain for us to look for subtleties, or wear ourselves out uselessly, searching to mitigate this saying of Jesus Christ. If we are not justified by our words, we shall be condemned by them. Let us avoid this misfortune, we can do so by the help of that same Person who has wished so much to point out to us the pitfalls, and show us the way which leads to happiness. Let us ask for this help.

You know that I speak from the abundance of a heart very devoted to you.

Your spiritual Father
C. G. Van Crombrughe

Ghent, June 21, 1835

Self Respect

And he found in the Temple those that sold oxen, sheep and doves, and money changers seated there. He made a scourge of little cords and drove them all out of the Temple. And he said, "Take these things hence, and make not the house of my Father a house of traffic" (John 2,15).

Jesus Christ is so jealous of his Father's glory and of the respect which is due to his Temple that the profanations and irreverences which were committed there enkindle his indignation and anger, the Holy Scriptures teaches us.

We are the living temples of our Lord:

- i. By the grace and consecration that we have received by Baptism, and by the other Sacraments.
- ii. By our profession in virtue of which Jesus Christ has contracted with us the closest alliance, we are united to him by sacred and indissoluble bonds, by bestowing upon us all his goods, by the fruitfulness that his grace gives to our soul.
- iii. By God's love diffused in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who lives in us.
- iv. By the corporal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is really present in us by Holy Communion.

Imagine then, the sanctity of your state. If you respect the material temples of the loving God, you have no less reason to respect the spiritual temples, that is to say, yourselves.

Would you dare to set up on the altar of a church in front of the Tabernacle where Jesus Christ is present, an idol of the robber Mercury, immodest Venus, or drunken Bacchus? Would you dare to admit into the temple of your hearts where Jesus Christ resides, where the Holy Spirit is present, where all belongs to your divine Spouse, would you dare to admit there any attachment whatever, contrary to your duty? Would you dare to profane your love by giving it to yourself, to any place, or fancy or occupation? Would you refuse Jesus all your affection? Would you give it to some other in preference to Jesus Christ? Would not this be to dethrone Jesus Christ and put an idol in his place; to refuse Jesus Christ the gold of your love to give it to another; the incense of your tender sighs, of your fervent prayers to busy yourself with earthly desires; the myrrh of your mortifications to live a life of sensuality?

Is not troubling your heart with the effects of some forbidden passion profaning the temple of God? Would you dare to pollute the air of a church by liberating a poisonous gas, or disturb the religious tranquility which should exist there by making clattering noises? How would you dare to trouble the serenity of your heart where Jesus Christ deigns to make his abode either by fear, anger, aversion, attachment to creatures, or by the existence of any other cause of trouble?

Thus, all that is contrary to the interior worship which you must give to God, all that is opposed to the spirit of piety or not in accord with your advancement in virtue, all that interferes with your intimate union with your divine Spouse, all that must be absolutely destroyed in you, and excluded from your heart as contrary to the purity which Jesus Christ has the right to exact from you. If your divine Spouse finds fault with you, corrects you, if he treats you sometimes with severity, be assured that it is with the merciful design of purifying your soul and of making you worthy to serve him in his temple.

Further the zeal of Jesus Christ; beg him to adorn the sanctuary which he himself has chosen. Thank him for the blows which he gives through love so as to avert the terrible consequences of his justice if you should not clear his temple of all that profanes it; if you should not rid his Father's house of all that makes it a house of traffic, and which rouses in him such just anger.

Read from the Imitation of Christ, Book III, Chapter 34.

Solitude and Recollection

Solitude and recollection are indispensable to religious life. Study and teaching must not, nor need not hinder it.

In the touching ceremony of the Profession of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, after the funeral pall with which they had been covered is removed from the newly professed, as a sign of their voluntary death to the world, the minister of Jesus Christ addresses these words to them:

You must understand, Madam, by this last ceremony, and by the prayers which accompanied it, that in virtue of the holy profession that you have made, you must regard yourself from this time forth as truly dead to the world and pledged to live only for God. Never forget, then, your life must be hidden in God with Jesus Christ, and that after your profession which must be for you as a new baptism, you will always walk in a new life.

It follows from this that as Christians, their baptism, as that of the faithful, obliges them to die and to be buried with Jesus Christ; their profession, which according to the Holy Fathers, is a second baptism, obliges them still more strictly to this death and this mystical burial with their divine Spouse. Disillusioned with all vanities of the world, they must nourish the taste for retreat and silence, so indispensable to this life hidden in God with Christ. This is rigorously enforced on all religious, and the Rule of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph does not deviate on this point from the general rule.

In fact, except for the visits of outsiders which are very rare in our convents, and the business which Superiors have with the parents of our students, which, reduced to the necessary minimum, is itself rare enough, all the rest of our communities enjoy tranquilly the advantages of solitude.

The work of teaching, which partly replaces manual labor, requires much more than the latter a profound recollection, an infinite patience, because those who are impatient or dissipated in teaching make futile efforts and are but "as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal", as the Apostle says. Their words deprived of spirit and life will be dead words, their withered hearts contain neither unction, nor the grace of persuasion, nor true feeling; all languishes because man supplants God, putting vile passions in the place of his holy grace.

When our Sisters confine themselves to the simple charitable teaching to which they are enjoined by obedience, teaching does not cause dissipation. If, according to their Rule, they are filled with the spirit of prayer, they easily resist in their occupations the temptation to be dissipated. What God makes them do will not take them away from him, but they must do it as God wishes it to be done. They must know exactly what they must teach their students. They must know the truths of religion, the principles of wise, modest, and industrious conduct, certain sciences according to the needs of the times, and the capacity of the children. But they must avoid like poison, studies of pure curiosity, and vain amusements of the mind. "Women," says the wise Fénelon, "are no less prone to vanity of intellect than to vanity of appearance. Often the reading that they have done with such earnestness becomes a useless bauble and vain adornment of the mind."

The Daughters of Mary and Joseph study to make themselves capable of fulfilling the exercises of their vocation; they must simply read to learn. To study well, the subject matter must be thought over carefully and thoroughly mastered. As to pious reading, care must be taken in this also not to seek distractions unworthy of a religious. It is not necessary to understand a great number of truths, but each truth should be loved very much, and allowed to penetrate the heart little by little, to become attached to it less by subtle reflections than by the feeling of conviction; then, far from causing dissipation and vanity, learning and reading are aids to recollection and humility.

But the imagination, the continual restlessness, the inattention of the children, must not this cause the religious to have a disposition contrary to this indispensable recollection? The thought that their divine Spouse loves these children in spite of their imperfections, that he wishes us to learn from them true simplicity, and, what is more, that he assures us that all we do to the least of his little ones we do it to him, will not these truths, I say, fill their hearts with feelings of love for a function which makes them resemble so closely Mary and Joseph in the care of our Lord during his infancy. In giving us the care of his children he deigns to be under obligation to us.

Far from being causes of dissipation or aridity, these functions will be a fruitful source of virtue, and acts of the highest perfection. Oh, how faith and love can change things for those who study them, and conform to their teaching, and what interior grace they give.

As for silence, in case of necessity, obedience, and the conversations of the Rule, the Daughters of Mary and Joseph keep silence continually; to this end, they curtail their communications from within and without, they carefully refrain from all curiosity, particular attachments, stories, and even idle thoughts, of which an account must be rendered one day, as well as of guilty thoughts. If then, they speak, it is to obey, to instruct, or edify, and what they say does not dissipate them. Thus, our religious quietly enjoy the sweetness of peace, recollection and silence; and in giving it to others from the abundance of their heart, they will keep enough for themselves of what the divine Spouse wishes to see there. Without aridity or exhaustion they will water, tend and nurture, they will cause to grow and flower the young plants whose fruits will be scattered later in the garden of the Church of Jesus Christ.

On my part, I will never cease praying to the Lord to scatter on all the Institute which belongs to him alone, his spirit and his love; to give to all my children the spirit of their state, to their hearts like his heart, the renouncement of all self-interest, and above all, that charity which is the root of all true virtue.

May they understand, O my God, that they are very small, and that you are everything. Give them to understand the science of Jesus Christ which will keep them always humble, and make them useful to their neighbor. To put all your gifts in a safe place, allow them true solitude and interior and exterior silence. Amen

Your very devoted spiritual Father
C. G. Van Crombrugghe

Ghent, April 5th, 1836

Note: In the French edition a pencil line is drawn through the paragraphs beginning with, " In the touching ceremony of Profession... to "...do not deviate on this point from the general rule.

The Diversity of Talents *

"There are diversities of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are diversities of ministries, but the same Lord" (I Cor. 12,4).

We have all received from God some talent suitable for the state to which divine Providence destined us. St. Gregory the Great says, "No one can say I have not received any talent and therefore shall not have to account for it." According to the ever adorable designs God has for each one of us, his generous hand distributes his graces among us, gives us diverse talents suitable to the particular needs of his providence.

To show the obligation which is ours to use these talents as God wishes, Jesus Christ compares himself in the Gospel as a master who, before going on a journey, distributes different talents among his servants, and bids them trade with them during his absence. He wishes to teach us here to neglect nothing, not to hide, but to make use of all the gifts which we have received from his bounty. The condemnation which the unworthy servant receives because he had neglected to increase his talent, however small it might be, warns us of the fate which awaits us if, through timidity or laziness or any other cause, we hide the talents which he has confided to us for his glory, and for the use of his Church.

It is a fundamental point then, in the work of our perfection, to devote ourselves to the cultivation of these talents which God had given us, and to use them for the good of the Church according to our particular position. A mistake here can lead to deplorable consequences. By a lamentable but very violent inclination we are often led to obey our whims rather than our duties. We neglect to use our talents according to God's plan to experiment with another which we do not possess, and which we cannot use according to the designs of Providence. We avoid a certain occupation and we seek another which suits our taste, or even our fancy. But then the work is always without success and without merit because the Master does not accept a work which is only done through self-seeking. This is the worldly spirit; it is timidity, ambition, or some passion which makes one seek one certain work, and avoid another; it is also by following this worldly spirit that one strays away and at the end one is lost. St. Peter says, "Let each then, as faithful dispensers of God's diverse graces, give to others the services he is capable to give, according to the gift he has received."

Talents, whatever they may be, are gifts from the liberality of our Master. We do not have them of ourselves. If we have received them, what right have we to boast as if we had not received them? (I Cor. 4,7) Our cooperation with grace is itself a gift of the Lord, and it is only in him that we may glorify ourselves. Let us take care therefore not to give ourselves the praise which belongs to God, for that would be like offering sacrifices to the apostate angel, and would draw on ourselves the reproach which God made to his people, "I have given them gold and silver, and they have made sacrifices of them to Baal."

May those among us who have received great talents never let themselves be dazzled by them; may they take care not to take advantage of them or lift themselves above the others in their minds, or to despise those who have been less favored with God's gifts, but may they cultivate them according to God's designs, for they will render an account of them.

Those who have received only moderate gifts must not envy those who have received great ones, but they must use them faithfully with great zeal and confidence. St. Bernard says, "You are only asked to do what you are able; often the smallest talents are as useful to the Church as those that are the most brilliant. Use generously the little you have received, you will only have to give an account of the talent that has been given to you."

Just as functions differ, so talents required to fill them must be different. Functions will be very well filled if each one devotes herself wholeheartedly, and, as duty requires.

If charity unites you to your sisters as members of one body unite to enjoy common well being, you all participate in the good of our body - the Institute, and you all participate in its merits, less in proportion to your talents than the disposition of your heart. "Never envy me in the least," says St. Augustine, "what I have is yours as much as mine. If on my part, I live without envy, charity will make me share with you what you possess."

Whatever your talents may be, my dear daughters use them for the good of our Institute, which is itself all for our Lord. Let us love the charity which edifies and which unites and keeps away from us this false science which inflates and separates in order to destroy.

Let us never forget that we have always more need of saints than of learned people to carry out the plans of divine Providence for us and our Institute. Whatever may be the degree of competency we attain let us be on our guard to be neither obstinate nor quick to speak of what we know better than others. Let us not be infatuated with novelties, nor by curiosities which arouse the emotions. All these things expose us to the danger of losing that interior spirit of grace, recollection and prayer, much more necessary than human sciences for doing the work of God according to our holy vocation.

Lastly, our reading, our studies, our reflections should always be such as to help us to see our needs before the Lord, to overcome our natural inclinations, to conquer ourselves, to serve our neighbor with zeal, generosity, disinterestedness and perseverance. After that, let us leave all to God; we shall not wait in vain.

Your loving Father in Jesus Christ
C. G. Van Crombrugghe

Ghent, August 20, 1836

Note: Except for slight variations, which may be attributed to the translator's interpretation of the original in French, this Instruction is identical to one addressed to the Josephites. Ref. "The Founder Speaks"

On Work

And God said to Adam, "Because you ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, cursed be the ground because of you. In toil shall you eat of its yield all the days of your life (Gen. 3,17)

That is how the obligation to work was imposed upon man for the expiation of sin. But sin is common to all men, then we are also included in the sentence passed by divine Justice. Let us submit ourselves generously then to this obligation, and following the example of our holy patrons Mary and Joseph and even Jesus Christ himself, let us work by the sweat of our brow to pay in this way our debts to the eternal justice and store up treasure in heaven.

What a disgrace if the children of the world show more courage to acquire perishable goods than the children of light to gain that which neither moth nor rust can ever spoil! But see how from dawn to dusk and often into the night some work to obtain the bread which feeds them; others to add to the attractiveness of a fleeting life. See such as these exposing themselves to the fatigue of travel, others facing danger on the seas, braving perilous odds in combat to satisfy their vain curiosity, to amass riches, or to obtain fanciful honors. Never let be said that the Daughters of Mary and Joseph let themselves be surpassed in zeal in working for the things of God by the children of the world whose views do not extend beyond this world of illusion and misery.

St. Francis Xavier when about to embark for Japan, reproved his timid friends who wished to dissuade him from his project by showing him the dangers and fatigues of the journey. "I am surprised," he said to them, "that you wish to prevent me from going to save souls in a place where the hope of amassing temporal wealth takes you. I am ashamed to have been forestalled, and it grieves me to see that traders have more courage than missionaries."

That is what we should say, my dear daughters, if it should happen that lack of courage, of generosity, or forgetfulness even should make the difficulties or fatigues of our daily duties appear greater than they are. Acting on these principles you will go wherever holy obedience sends you, you will carry the burden it imposes on you, and you will esteem yourself happy to be able to bend your sinful body under the yoke of Jesus Christ, that generous Spouse who will carry the burden with you, and who, by carrying the heavier share of the load, and by the aid of his grace, will make you follow him closely in the way of courageous love.

Recall to mind sometimes, my dear daughters, the words spoken by the Reverend Mother General the moment she received you from the novitiate, "We are not here to rest, but to work with great zeal for our salvation, and in the service of our holy Mother Church, and finally to reach heaven, the place of our eternal rest. Blessed work, since it will obtain for us rest that nothing can trouble.

Yes, say that yourselves, blessed, a thousand times blessed be the work which obtains for us eternal rest in heaven!

The Feast of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary

My dear Daughters in Jesus Christ

The approach of this precious day when the Church reminds us of the offering that our august Mother made to God of her whole self, and on which, after her example, you renew your holy vows, and ratify the sacred promises which you made at the happy moment of your religious profession, seems to me to be a favorable opportunity to remind you of the meaning of those promises which you have made, the extent of the obligations which you have undertaken toward your heavenly Spouse Jesus Christ, and that you are about to renew at the foot of the holy Altar.

Mary at her Presentation supplies you with the perfect model of what you undertook at your Profession, and are about to ratify in her presence before the divine Savior. Now Mary gave herself to the Lord with all the generosity and affection of her immaculate heart. She gave herself with no restrictions whatever, the thoughts of her mind, the workings of her will, her desires, her likes, her body, her time - all is God's, and will be his irrevocably.

That my dear Daughters, is how you should offer yourselves to Jesus Christ; that is how you should consider the ratification which you are about to make of your offering which the angels with their Queen present on your part to the Lord. Thanks to the light which the Holy Spirit has given you, you have renounced your fathers, your mothers, your relatives, temporal goods, worldly ambitions; you have also renounced yourselves. It is only by this double renunciation that you have merited the place which you occupy in the heart of your divine Spouse. To renounce what you have is the easiest part; to renounce what you are and continue to renounce it every minute, that is what is required to complete the sacrifice and make you always agreeable to Jesus Christ. This is the holocaust that you offer; the sacred fire must entirely consume the victims.

Examine yourselves seriously if you still cling to some attachment, if you nourish preferences, if you hesitate at making sacrifices, renouncements, if the creature or self is put on the same level as the Creator and the divine will. Judge yourselves with severity. After humbling yourselves, rise and go to Mary; you have a special claim to her tenderness. She will come to your aid; she will efface the stains which would make you less attractive to her Son. She will adorn your soul with new gifts, and will offer you to Jesus Christ.

O, what a sweet welcome you will receive! Prepare for it carefully. I promise you a very special remembrance to the Lord in Holy Mass during this time, and I give you my blessing with all my heart.

Your always devoted Father in Jesus Christ
C. G. Van Crombrugghe

Ghent, November 16th, 1844

* Same as Letter 7-28 addressed to Mme Superior and the Ladies of the Convent of St. John the Baptist.

Spiritual Trials

He who does not carry his cross, who does not follow me, cannot be my disciple, says the Lord (Luke 19).

After having outlined your perfection on Tabor, my dear daughters, God called you by the sweet attraction of his grace, and in doing so, delivered you from the deceitful and foolish joys of the world. The crucified Spouse completes the work of mercy and gives it his final touch on Calvary, by taking away all sensitive consolations. He makes you live by pure faith only, and makes you follow him, carrying your cross. The cross is the great characteristic of the elect. The generous fidelity, with which you carry that cross that our divine Savior distributes to each one of us, is the distinctive seal of your predestination, the true way to your sanctification.

Independent of the obligations of your holy state, which bind you every day to the cross of Jesus Christ, is the cross which you try to closely embrace in order to remain constantly near your divine Spouse. There are among the treasures of the love of God, extraordinary crosses which he distributes at his own discretion, to some privileged friends and to those who have special needs. These are the spiritual trials.

Those trials are sometimes tremendous, in an admirable way. They bring the weak disciples closer to the celestial model. No matter how crucifying or painful those aridities may be, no matter the fears of the spiritual desolations, Jesus never remains away too long without revealing himself to the brave and submitted soul.

Love gives the spouse eyes that can pierce the mysterious darkness through the trials. Even the thickest clouds could not totally hide the face of the Spouse. There are always some rays of light that pierce through. Some light radiates to our faith, which is helped by confidence and love. Do not get distraught or discouraged, my dear Children, when Jesus imposes some heavy crosses on you. Judge by the intensity of his love and the intensity of your pains, by the force of remedies which this gentle friend, this bright Doctor finds to willingly give you. Draw from your crosses a new source of confidence, of love, and of consolation.

There is no comparison between your pains, your limited hurts, and the immense amount of glory which must be the reward already here on earth and until eternity.

With St. Paul, you then can say, "I am attached to the cross with Jesus Christ." It is with the divine Spouse that you are attached to the cross. His divine grace is the link in this unutterable union which no human satisfaction could tempt to break. Think less of your suffering. Think, rather, about the happiness of suffering with Jesus. Ask for love, and those sufferings will not be so painful anymore. Remain submissive and Jesus will carry most of the burden. "Be reassured. It is I. Do not be afraid." That is what the good Master will say to you, in the same way as he reassured the Apostles who were troubled by the trials.

Be aware of the spirit of discouragement. Should you experience it, it would not be the spirit of the Beloved One. That would not be his voice. It would be the voice of the angel of darkness. It would be the voice of the spirit of lies that would be looking to seduce you, trying to separate you from Jesus, the crucified, trying to make you think about yourself, your own misery, which is always hideous and desperate when seen in isolation.

The fruits of those pains suffered with Jesus Christ are as precious as they are abundant.

1. Those pains serve to pay back for the debts which occurred because of sin. They also help to cure the diseases of the soul, particularly the subtle self-satisfaction which is so deeply rooted in us and most difficult to destroy.
2. They prepare us to receive the supernatural light that rises for the just, in the midst of darkness in times of trials, as David commented.
3. They bring out such great spiritual goodness in the souls that these souls sometimes experience, in this life, what the apostle says about the holy ones in heaven. They already taste the sweetness that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, that no heart has felt in the natural order of things. To unfaithfully reap the wealth of ordinary and extraordinary crosses, here are some rules with which you should familiarize yourself in case you need to use them.
 - i. Wisely keep your spiritual pains secret. Let nothing be shown eternally. As much as it depends on you, do not betray the secret. The fragrance of patience would evaporate if scattered. Everything

that happens must be kept between your Superior, the divine Spouse, and you. Then a simple disclosure of your inner pains will bring grace and will always be followed by relief.

ii. Be docile, and accept the judgment of those in authority who should guide you. Then rely on what God asks of you, being faithful and dependent on his decision. It is a dangerous remedy to examine your pain too closely. It embitters and aggravates the wound of the heart or of the spirit. Any exercise or search for security, which is not agreeable with that obedience and abandonment dictated by your rule cannot be from God.

iii. Accept the cross which God presents to you. Make yours the crucifying feeling of the Lord with simplicity. Do not increase the difficulties by adding some of your own. Through a prompt fidelity, stop the temptations and the problems of pride right from the start. You will easily master them if you deal with them right away. No matter how humiliating the temptations might be, it will turn to profit your soul. When you suffer, endure the temptation without worry if you know how to recognize the diminishing intrigues of your pride.

iv. Should any doubts about the past occur in these moments of sadness and spiritual pains, do not allow any time for examining them. Do not allow any thought to worry you or exhaust you in these circumstances. Occupy your mind; concentrate on things which enable you to bring light and confidence to your soul, or which would at least help to avoid any trouble.

v. Do not forget in times of trial that temptations are not sins. If it is not freely and deliberately done, you cannot be guilty before God. If in doubt that any feeling or thought were deliberate, you may believe they were not whenever it is concerning matters that you do not usually consent to intentionally, because you would obviously not consent to it unless you reflected on it, and examined it thoroughly, in circumstances where the fear of evil is greater in you.

vi. Finally, do not forget either, that peace here on earth can only be found when obedient to faith and to God's will. Peace does not exempt us from suffering annoyances, temporary and spiritual pains. We have to accept those pains as being the will of God who loves us, who knows what is good for our happiness, and who works at it with tender care worthy of his divine love.